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ABSTRACT

This document addresses the difficulty some students face in selecting a college major that matches their career pursuits. It includes a set of seven steps which can help high school, college, and adult students in selecting a college major. The steps presented deal with: (1) decision making skills; (2) self-assessments to identify priorities; (3) awareness of institutions, activities, involvements, and relationships which are congruent with individual values; (4) identification of factors which may influence the decision about a college major; (5) a knowledge of available college majors; (6) selecting the appropriate college; and (7) hints for lifelong development. The second section of the document provides steps for counselors, academic advisors, and student personnel workers who are involved in helping students select college majors and careers. Helping professionals are advised to establish a theoretical base or career development philosophy, stay current, maintain an updated bibliography of career- and academic-related materials, be familiar with most popular college majors, provide life planning worksheets to students, be aware of where to refer students for further assistance, and maintain a determination to assist students. (NB)

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COLLEGE MAJORS AND CAREERS:

HOW TO SELECT A COLLEGE MAJOR

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COLLEGE MAJORS and CAREERS

INTRODUCTION

Selecting a college major that matches one's career pursuits is an extremely difficult task for most college students. This is due, in part, to a rapidly changing society, which has made the process of selecting an appropriate college major increasingly more complicated and necessary. In order to better ensure that students will realize personal fulfillment and minimize economic inefficiency, it is necessary for students to have certain knowledge and skills. Consequently, it requires that counseling and advising professionals maintain and share with students the necessary knowledge and skills (or process) which will enable them to select college majors which will complement and support other valued life endeavors. It is a process which demands of the student the continuous use of good decision making skills, self assessment techniques, awareness of societal influences and application of an effective career planning model. For the professional, it means an ongoing active commitment to a career development philosophy, staying abreast and being creative in spite of limitations. The following provides some valuable tips for both students and professionals.

How To Select A College Major

(For high school, college and adult students)

Before choosing a college major, the student should be aware that it is only one of a number of important and usually expensive decisions in the lifelong process of career planning.

1. THE STUDENT SHOULD LEARN THE STEPS THAT ARE REQUIRED FOR MAKING GOOD DECISIONS AND APPLY THEM THROUGHOUT THE CAREER PLANNING PROCESS. GENERALLY, EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING WILL INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

    * Become aware of the need to make a decision. Clearly state the concern or whatever it is that requires that a choice be made.
    * Be able to specifically identify what it is you value and what you want to accomplish or obtain (goals) in any given situtation.
    * Carefully examine the information you have and decide if you need any additional information in order to make an informed and wiser decision.
    * After gathering enough information, determine the possible results of each of the choices you are aware of.
    * Select from the possible choices the one you believe will be best suited to assist you to reach your goal(s).
    * Develop and implement a plan of action (short term and intermediate goals along with strategies to reach them).
    * Whenever necessary, review and repeat this process in terms of your original decision.

2. THE FIRST STEP IN SELECTING A COLLEGE MAJOR IS TO IDENTIFY WHO YOU ARE AND DETERMINE WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN LIFE. MANY MATERIALS AND SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE TO ASSIST STUDENTS IN THIS PROCESS (I.E., GUIDANCE OFFICES, CAREER PLANNING & PLACEMENT CENTERS, CAREER RESOURCE CENTERS, LIBRARIES, BOOKSTORES, ETC.). THIS PROCESS IS COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS <u>SELF-ASSESSMENT</u> AND USUALLY INCLUDES THE IDENTIFICATION OF:

    * Life and Work Values
    * Interests and Temperaments
    * Personal Attributes and Character Qualities
    * Skills (aptitudes & abilities)
    * Strengths and Weaknesses
    * Attitude and Goals

(over)

3. THE SECOND STEP IS TO BECOME AWARE OF THE BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RELATED OUTSIDE INSTITUTIONS, ACTIVITIES, INVOLVEMENTS, AND RELATIONSHIPS; THOROUGHLY EXPLORE THOSE WHICH REALISTICALLY REFLECT YOU AND WHAT YOU VALUE. THESE MAY INCLUDE:

   * Family and Religion
   * World of Work
   * Education and Training (colleges & universities, trade schools, apprenticeships, etc.)
   * Leisure Time Activities (recreation, hobbies, travel, etc.)
   * Political (government, military, etc.)

4. IDENTIFY POSSIBLE INFLUENCING FACTORS WHICH MAY HELP YOU TO DETERMINE YOUR SELECTION.

   * Religious, Family and Friendship Involvements and Relationships.
   * Educational and Training Cost, Length, Availability and Location.
   * Economic Conditions and Occupational Outlook.
   * Financial Status and Personal Health.
   * Past Experiences, Self-Esteem and Attitude.
   * Age, Ethnicity, etc.

5. IT WILL BE ASSUMED THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED THAT A COLLEGE EXPERIENCE IS THE MOST APPROPRIATE CHOICE. YOU SHOULD NOW BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE DESCRIPTIONS OF THE COLLEGE MAJORS WHICH MORE CLOSELY MATCH YOU AND YOUR VALUES. (THE RESULTS OF YOUR SELF-ASSESSMENT + A REALISTIC CONSIDERATION OF INFLUENCING FACTORS--IT IS SUGGESTED THAT YOU SEEK THE ASSISTANCE OF A CAREER OR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR WHEN DOING THESE TASKS).

6. SELECT THE COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY WHICH OFFERS THE MAJOR YOU BELIEVE MATCHES YOUR SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS THE BEST AND MOST APPROPRIATELY CONSIDERS LIFE INFLUENCING FACTORS.

7. FINALLY, EACH PERSON SHOULD CONTINUE THROUGHOUT LIFE TO:

   * Maintain a specific awareness of who he is.
   * Identify and maintain a close watch on that which is most important to him in life.
   * Stay abreast of how and when influencing factors make it necessary to adjust or make new decisions in terms of career direction.
   * Be ready, willing and actually implement the career decision making process outlined in #1 (or a similar process).

It is believed that a careful and thorough application of the aforementioned steps will assist students to more accurately decide if college is for them as well as appropriately identify a college major which will complement other life endeavors.

How To Help Students Make More Suitable College Major and Career Selections

(For counselors, academic advisors and student personnel workers)

1. ESTABLISH A THEORETICAL BASE OR CAREER DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY
   A. Determine your beliefs
   Which career planning theory appears to be best for you in terms of career guidance? (i.e. Roe, Super, Holland, Ginzberg, etc.)

   Your beliefs will most likely be an adaptation of several theories, including your own.

   B. Actively practice what you believe but be open to change
   *Implement the philosophy which enables you to comfortably and effectively assist students.

   *The philosophy you choose should reflect, in part the fact that you have a specific awareness of who you are (personal & character qualities, skills, strengths, weaknesses, etc.) and what is most important to you in life (values and interests.)

   *Understand that due to new and modified theories continually being introduced, along with changes that are occuring within you and in the society at large, you must be willing and ready to adapt and try out different beliefs.

2. STAY CURRENT
   A. Read consistently and selectively, relevant information in professional journals, newspapers, newsletters, periodicals and books.

   B. Join and actively maintain membership in a realistic number of national, state and local career-related professional organizations (i.e. NCDA, AACD, ASCUS, etc.)

   C. Selectively attend career-related local, state and national workshops, seminars, conferences or conventions.

   D. Maintain contact with colleagues in Career Planning & Placement Centers (or other similar offices) in higher educational institutions.

3. MAINTAIN AN UPDATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CAREER/ACADEMIC SUBJECT-RELATED BOOKS AND MATERIALS IN YOUR OFFICE, DEPARTMENT OR INSTITUTION. REFER STUDENTS TO SOURCES, WHEN NECESSARY.

4. MAINTAIN A FAMILIARITY WITH OR BE ABLE TO QUICKLY LOCATE THE DESCRIPTIONS OF THE MOST POPULAR COLLEGE MAJORS.

5. PROVIDE LIFE PLANNING WORKSHEETS OR ASK SELECTED EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS (OR SOME SIMILAR ACTIVITY) THAT WILL ASSIST THE STUDENT TO IDENTIFY VALUES, INTERESTS, PERSONAL & CHARACTER QUALITIES, SKILLS, ETC. ASSIST STUDENTS TO MATCH RESULTS WITH RELATED COLLEGE MAJORS.

6. BE AWARE OF WHERE, WITHIN YOUR SCHOOL OR COMMUNITY, MORE DETAILED MATERIALS, EXPLORATION OPPORTUNITIES AND SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE. REFER STUDENTS WHEN APPROPRIATE.

7. MAINTAIN A DETERMINATION TO ASSIST STUDENTS IN THIS AREA, IN SPITE OF LIMITATIONS.
   A. Creative use of student help can assist you with locating and compiling materials, resource lists, etc.
   B. A personal and professional commitment is required for continuing success.